LIGHTBRINGER

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by P. Julian

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First published Smashwords 2013
ISBN-13: 978-1545556276
ISBN-10: 154555627X

WINSTANLEY Jones was a strange name but Winnie was not always called by that name. His mother named him Clementine, after the darling of that song, without a thought for the fact that he was a boy, because he was her everything and her light and shade and she knew when she finally saw him what his name was and she had no doubt of it. And when she held him, in those short moments that were allotted her to hold him, she cooed and he burbled and she called him Clementine in her soft voice and said oh Clementine. Oh my darling oh my darling.

Winstanley was the boy's middle name, and was a thought in honour of his maternal grandfather, who was an unreformed communist in his younger days, and though bitterness had seized him now he was still a collector of working class heroes. Although they were all good men his only favourite was Brave Winstanley, who led his men into the Diggers Revolt until that revolt was put down by evil men and especially Churchmen. Gerrard Winstanley was a righteous man, but he also knew how to write directly from his heart and Grandfather would say that this one thing made all the difference. Grandfather loved to quote Winstanley, especially his edict that the preaching of religion should be punishable by death.

Clementine Winstanley Jones came into the world on a bitter night, and he was held and called My Darling at precisely the same

moment that his mother began to haemorrhage savagely from some damage done through giving birth to him. She held him and loved him and that love penetrated his vagrant soul and pinned him down to earth in the very moment she was being released. She soon felt dreamy but put that down to hormones or the fatigue of birth and only when it was very late did she turn to the midwife and say: I'm sorry to be a pain but I am wet down there and I feel very faint. Is it normal for that to happen? With half a gallon of her own blood now soaked into the hard hospital sheets.

Oh they did what they could. There was urgency and the transfusion of blood and even a late hysterectomy in all due desperation. They worked and coaxed her back a few times but in the end her head turned away and poor kind Bonnie Jones just slipped away, despite all of the panic, and her husband watched her pass despite every effort of the doctors and he felt violent nausea and he felt himself utterly undone. He sat with his only love as she grew cold, rocking in his chair and keening softly until a kind nurse brought him tea and said: it is fine if you need to give him up. He said thank you so much in a nasty way and he said that Grandfather could have him, now seeing as how he was named for one of his fool heroes and would she be so kind as to call him and have the child taken away. When they brought him a phone with his father in law on the line he said: she is gone. And without pausing he said: you and Emma need to take the boy. And Clementine is not his name. The boy is to be called Winstanley. I hope you are happy with that. And he hung up the phone and walked through the night to his newly empty house, and what met him there were horrors and a terrible demon, and although he did not survive the agony of that night it was only on a narrow view that his death could be said to be the work of his own hands.

Winstanley Jones went to live with his grandparents, and although they did their best by him they were prey to terrible limitations and there was little love to go around. Winnie's grandfather was an

extravagant drunk who harked back only to history and thus knew only defeat for his heroes and his cause and he lived entirely without hope for the current generation. The brave perish and with them justice, he would tell Winstanley, especially after he had been drinking. And if he could not afford grog until pension day he would watch television folded up tight in his recliner and he would be death-silent, apart from a mean-spirited laugh that dripped with contempt: Ha!

Winnie's grandmother suffered from anxiety, although back then they called it Nerves and Winnie could always tell when her Nerves were bad. The world seemed to her to be a bitter place and she smoked continuous strong fags and looked out the window and scratched her arms until they were a mass of sores. Winnie would dress them and try to get her to wear her cotton gloves and to cut her nails but she said: leave me boy it makes it better. She would peer at him as he insisted and she would spit: I wouldn't feel so superior if I were you. She never said any more but Winnie knew what she meant and though he tried to apologise she would say it was an accident Winstanley I don't know what you are talking about. And he endured that false reality, and he was gentle with himself even where nobody else would be because he thought that was how his mother would have wanted him to be, if she had ever loved him.

Winnie had some friends at school, plain quiet boys who meant no harm and who liked him for his kindness and his occasional jokes at his own expense. But he would not have them to his house, for it was without welcome, and in any event he was usually in the garden or up a ladder on the weekend. He spent a lot of time by himself and he dreamed and played games with himself to keep him amused. His favourite game was to lie on the buffalo grass in the sun with his eyes shut and imagine his mother floating just above him, straining to break through the bonds that kept her away from this world so that she could be with him and take care of him and

love him like he needed to be loved. There were times he could not imagine her, but so too were there times when it was all he could do to stop himself from reaching out to her and pulling her through that veil of death which separated them and which conspired to deprive him of her love. In those times he would hear music and even soft words and he would never tell anyone about these times. His Grandmother would yell at him to get up lest he get dirty or catch his death of cold, and if he said he was nice and warm in the sun she would say skin cancer, then, you will die of that and it will be terrible for you. He got up and smiled hard and he never told her that he was actually already dying to have his mother back again.

Winstanley loved to sleep, or at least to drift off to sleep, because this way he would have some time out of the world and enter a world of different desires, where other things might become reality. His mother sometimes appeared to him but a much more common dream was the wedding dream he would have. He always began riding a tall copper horse, clutching at its mane as they galloped without saddle through mountains and forest, driven by a dire urgency born of the need to rescue a woman from a terrible disaster. Their route varied, across dunes or rivers or stony waste, but they would always arrive at the same spot: a wedding amongst willow trees in lush green grass. Winstanley would dismount and approach the rows of people standing to face the altar, but he would never be afforded a glimpse of the girl he knew he was to rescue. As he approached a ripple would go through the crowd, and they would all swivel slowly to face him and he would see that they had no faces, just blank sallow expanse and coal-black eyes, and although they would say nothing he would know what they were thinking and that was: you dare to approach us? You, whom no one loves? And they would laugh without mouths and that was a hideous sound, like bones scraping on rock, and it was enough to wake him up in a sweat and make him reach for his bedside light, just to thwart the demons that would arrest him there in the unforgiving dark of the night. He reached for the switch and he

would think just one quiet thought that came to him from somewhere else than his own mind: I am a being of light.
And the light would disperse his fear.

Winnie's horse and wedding dream persisted and he never made further headway into it, but there were other nights and in one of them he had a better dream that was not unfinished even though it was strange. On this night he was asleep and then he slowly seemed to wake up from sleep, lying on his back with a strong warm presence on either side of him, and there were voices and when he heard these voices he heard a woman and a man speak in unison, softly in either ear, and it was a wonderful complete sound and they spoke to him of many things some now forgotten and there were included these things.

Winstanley Jones, they said. Take heart and be of great courage, for we are with you now.

We know you have suffered much, but no cloud has come over your heart. We have watched in hope and all of our expectations have been exceeded and we have rejoiced in this and you should know this and rejoice.

Brave Winstanley Jones. We are now permitted to bestow a gift upon you. We would bestow more but this is all that we are permitted to give. There are edicts you cannot imagine and they are inscribed into the fabric of the universe. We hope one day to show you everything that you would wish to know but for now you cannot know anything but this.

This gift is useful only to the pure of heart. It may help you greatly but much depends upon the purity of your intentions, and your courage even in the face of death. It may also expose you to danger that you would rather avoid, by seeking the welfare of others over your own welfare, but in this it does no more than your own heart

does.

The true nature of the world is vast and there are things in it that you may only dream of. Take heart in your suffering because consequences and truth may only be manifest in a long view of things. In this you will prove wise. The fear and greed in debased hearts foreshortens sight and for this reason we see much further than these others can see.

Winstanley Jones we have set our hearts on you. That is our choice to make and not yours and if we fail then this is our responsibility entirely. You must go on as your heart directs you and not because you are chosen. Only actions that are so motivated will bring you to your success.

Winstanley Jones. Take heart and be of great courage. You have already risen to a point that we did not foresee and we cannot foresee any limit to your further progress. You are our hearts' desire. Remember: in your darkest hour we stand to the left and to the right of you, willing you on, and also taking your suffering upon ourselves to the extent that we are able. Walk in the Light and be of good heart, for you will walk justly in the undiminished light of the world.

The morning after this dream Winnie woke up slowly, still in the supine position he had lain as those beings had spoken to him. He smiled his crinkled smile, thinking of his wonderful dream, and he felt a faint pulse from his right wrist and he brought it up to his face to see what the cause might be.

What he saw confounded his expectations, but there was only gentle wonder in his heart, rather than fear or shock. Bright upon his wrist was a bracelet of some silver-white metal that felt slippery to the touch, and it snaked this way and that as he tried to examine it. He eventually got hold and slid it around his wrist a couple of

times, looking for a loose link or a clasp but there seemed to be none, and when he tried to pull it off over his hand it jammed fast at the base of his palm. He looked again but there was no sign of any end to the bracelet and he smiled crookedly again and wondered to himself whether he was about to go mad.
And he remembered these words.

Take heart and be of great courage.

Winnie lay in bed and wondered about those words, and as sleep stole back over him he jolted awake again and decided he had better get up and see about some breakfast. He ate his usual plate of cereal and tried to turn his mind from the dream and the new addition to his arm, but it continued to pulse slightly, and that quiet reminder made it difficult for him to ignore it.

He rode his bike to school as usual, and when the rough kids on the school bus spat on him from the high windows the bracelet throbbed with one mighty pulse and Winnie felt a calm that he had not really felt before, in response to this tiresomely common event. He knew that it was not fair to be the brunt of such cruelty, but also that it did not spring from any defect of his own but rather from a defect in the boys who would spit on an innocent person just because they were in range. He felt some pity for them but not without feeling the injustice of their attacks, and his absolute right and duty to fight back against their savagery even though he might not eventually prevail.

School dragged as usual but lunch eventually came and that lunchtime Winnie was hanging out with his friends Arnold and Matthias, minding their own business and chatting and doing nothing in particular.

Now the three of them had come to expect insults and also blows from a horrible boy named Banger Harris, who had been nicknamed after an especially vicious league footballer and he did his best to live up to that name. He didn't appear during that lunchtime, and

they all thought they might have escaped him but with five minutes of lunch to go Banger and his mates sidled around a corner and slouched up to them in a menacing way.

How's it going, fags?
Banger was brilliantly witty.
I said: How's it going, you little fags?
They didn't answer.

You enjoying bumming one another, fags? Banger made bumming motions. See you know I got a bum too. So why don't you sniff my bum and tell me whether you like it?

He grabbed Winnie by the hair and forced his face down by his ass, and as he held him there he farted a horrible wet fart and his mates started screaming with laughter. Winnie twisted away but he only succeeded in sticking his face in Banger's crotch. Oh so now he wants so suck my dick! Banger sneered, while his mates fell over themselves at this hilarity.

Winnie turned his face away and drew a deep breath. He felt his bracelet pulse heavily and he could feel a tingling all the way up his right arm. Almost of their own accord his fingers clenched into a fist, and he gritted his teeth, and as Banger released him a bit he twisted and turned and swung his fist as hard as he possibly could.

Slam! Banger caught his fist as it swung towards his face. Punch me, would you? He sneered. I don't like little fags who try to punch me. So for that I am going to have to bring a bit of pain. And Banger started to squeeze his fist as hard as he could.

Winnie gritted his teeth again, but as the pressure increased he felt his hand strengthen also and he began to open his hand. Banger squeezed harder and Winnie paused before opening his hand wider and breaking Banger's grip. Banger stepped back with fear and surprise in his eyes and Winnie snatched out and caught his hand and then began to squeeze. Banger grunted and then began to

whimper as Winnie tightened his grip, and he forced Banger down to the ground. He went close to Banger and some words formed in him and he opened his mouth and spoke those words quietly in Banger's ear and to his own great surprise this is what he said.

This is a warning to you, Banger Harris. I am not who I was anymore. Leave me alone and leave my friends alone or I will make you leave us alone. I have plenty more in the tank, and if you don't believe that, feel this. And Winnie squeezed harder for a couple of seconds, making Banger cry out. Do you get it? he said. Leave. Us. Alone. And he let go of Bangers hand, and he went back to his friends and led them away from where they were and they followed him without question, and Banger clutched his sore hand and watched them but would not follow.

For a few days after this confrontation there was no sign of Banger in the playground, and Winnie's friends asked him what he had said to frighten him so badly and Winnie told them: I kind of just made it up. I told him to stay away from us, and leave us alone.

Time passed. One Thursday afternoon Winnie was sitting on the tram on his way home from school, watching a group of older boys tear up and down the aisles and harass the smaller kids. They picked especially on a skinny little kid named Shmuel, who was brave and tried to fight back but he was terribly slight and had a squeaky voice that was just breaking and he blushed heavily too and he had no real defences and the toughs were merciless to him.

I like your bracelet.
Winnie looked up to see a bird-eyed older lady smiling at him, pointing to his arm.
Thanks, he said.

I have something similar, she said, patting at a silver-white brooch on her blouse. But it is not quite like yours. You're a lucky boy,

Winstanley.

He looked at her in surprise and then blushed and said I'm sorry do I know you?

No, she said. But I know you. You're a rare one, she said. Very rare. They said that you would come in droves, eventually, but so far you're the only one.

She looked up at the commotion that was going on in the middle of the tram. The tough boys had taken a book from little Shmuel and were taunting him with it and reading out selections so that everyone on the tram could hear them. There was one word on the front of the book and it read: Diary. Shmuel had turned crimson and there were tears on his red lashes and Winstanley sighed and knew what he must do but as he got up to intervene the bird-lady grasped his wrist and said: Dear boy I believe it would be better to leave them to me. And she cleared her throat and in a thin imperious voice said: all of you boys come here to me this instant.

Now these were quite tough boys but the words she spoke cut through them instantly, and they hung their heads and obeyed automatically, and they were soon thronged around Winstanley and his new and surprising friend.

You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, she said. That boy is very brave but he cannot defend himself, and you are cowards all of you for tormenting him in this way. You will return his book immediately but not before you realise: Shmuel has a great talent for words and his talent will bring him fame in due course and he will be a much more substantial man than any of you. If you wish to prove your true worth I suggest that you pick on Winstanley here, and watch him cut you into ribbons. Now return the book, leave this vehicle, and never torment an innocent child again. If you disobey me I will set this boy upon you and mark my words he will demolish you. Now go.

The boys turned and walked directly to the door of the tram, with one of them stopping to return Shmuel's book to him. They alighted at the next stop and walked across the road and did not look back. When they were gone little Shmuel looked up nervously at the old lady and Winstanley and then he came to them and he looked at his shoes and blushed and sincerely gave his thanks.

Thank you Missus, he said.

Oh don't thank me. I had Winstanley's courage here at my disposal. Any authority I had drew directly from that source.

Poor Shmuel looked a bit confused but he was very gracious and he said: thank you Winstanley.

The lady laughed a little twittering laugh and said: you are both such good boys. And Shmuel, you can repay us by continuing to write. You have a great gift in you and although there are never any guarantees you should persist and be courageous and believe in yourself. And you must continue even if the world will not recognise your gift because any great artist will always struggle for recognition. You should write and you should never underestimate the power of stories, especially those from a gifted hand.

Shmuel thanked her and bowed and turned blushing back to his seat, smiling very broadly, and that night after dinner he wrote of the Lady on the Tram, and how she drew voice from the courage of Brave Winstanley, and then he turned to the beginning of the story and wrote of birth and death and he wrote of Love and the goodness in some people who will not bow down and he wrote until his mother yelled up the stairs and told him to go to bed. And in the darkness he wrote on in his mind without ceasing, and the book turned epic and there were many adventures and the eventual hero of his story was a brilliant woman whom he named Bella Fiori, and she was also fired by the courage of brave Winstanley, who had now become a man, and her destiny was more than to save a small boy from torment, her destiny was no less than the utter destruction

of all of the evil in the world, and the turning of human hearts towards each other, and the foundation of a paradise upon the earth.
Such is the power of stories, especially from a gifted hand.

Back on the tram the old lady got up as her stop approached and Winstanley said: can I help with your trolley? And the lady smiled and said well that would be lovely. When the tram stopped Winstanley jumped off and lifted the trolley down and the Lady said quick hop on and he said never mind it is only one stop.

You are a kind boy, she said. And there is vast courage in you as well. Such courage frightens old ladies like me, because it puts you in such terrible danger, but still I would not have you betray it and I must let you take your risks for they win you so much favour. Keep your pure heart within you and you will have what help can be given. And take heart, for there may be delights for your generation that I will not live to see.

She pressed her brooch to her chest and said: Winstanley Jones. Grow into a good and kind man. And pay heed to the light that will grow within you. In the final confrontation it can only be that light that will save you. And she turned and left him as in a dream, and he was in a trance state or similar, and when he woke up the tram was gone and he looked for the old lady to thank her but she had also disappeared.

After that meeting with the old lady he looked for her on the tram and down the street but he never did see her again. She remained with him though and he wondered at her deeds that day and also wondered why she claimed to draw authority for them from him and his own courage. He knew that the instant he stood up with courage she was empowered to act, and so he resolved to act always from that part of himself in the protection of others, and he knew that this was the right way to act regardless of the threat to

his own safety, and that it was especially a good way for a man to live his life if he could find such courage within him.

So Winstanley was brave. If he saw any bullying in the schoolyard he would wade straight in without regard for the consequences, and his meek friends shivered with his bravery and he copped a beating more often than he prevailed. But there was always something to compensate, and when he was called to the principal's office with the other boys he would feel his bracelet grow warm and he would relax and words would come from the centre of him somewhere and they were eloquent words and they would see that justice was done. Winnie also came to realise that physical pain was only that and only ever temporary, and that it was not to be feared but merely endured and that it would always pass in time.

Now the principal was a kind man and he called Winstanley in one day and he said my boy these are not your fights to have. You may get badly hurt one day. Winstanley thanked him for that advice but told him that he was bound by honour to intervene and he was sure that the principal would intervene also. I don't know about that, the man said. I might want to but I would be shit-scared. Winnie smiled and told him he was shit-scared every time but that was no excuse for cowardice.

So Winnie was very brave, and he was brave in spite of the fact that he was nearly always frightened of what the consequences of his bravery might be. The bracelet might help him sometimes but other times it seemed to let him down, like the time he swam out to rescue a boy who had been caught in a rip. Winnie struck out on a cheap foam board and the boy grabbed hold but they were dumped by the next wave and Winnie lost his hold and ended up alone in the vicious surf and drowning. He eventually got ashore but he had taken on a lot of water and he expired, only to come to again to find a girl his age pumping his chest and breathing him back to life with her mouth.

He grinned stupidly at her when he woke and asked: am I dead?

And she said nearly and how can I thank you for saving my brother? And that night she thanked him with kisses, leading him away from her family's campfire, and in the dark night her mouth was soft and so were her sighs and she said: you know you must either be stupid or very brave and he said: probably both. Her laugh tinkled out of her at that and it was a tender sound, as was her bright goodbye when her family decamped the next day and towed their caravan back to the city. Goodbye Winnie she said and he went to say goodbye but he stopped and just waved furiously and even blew her a kiss because he did not know her name to tell her a personal goodbye. He knew that he felt great love for this unnamed girl and also that his bracelet might work in mysterious ways and for this mysterious reward he was really terribly glad.

The bracelet would help him in strange ways. It would never support aggression of any kind and he soon learned not to go in to save boys with his fists flailing. He would step in quietly and speak quiet words from within him and they were really very unsettling, and if anyone tried to attack him he would stand firm and resist and sometimes immobilise his attackers with arm-locks, pushing them into the bitumen. His reputation at the school grew and everyone agreed that he was loco but it was only the bullies that feared Crazy Winstanley. Even small kids would offer him treats out of their lunchboxes, or sometimes a jam donut from the tuckshop, and he would always accept graciously and say: thank you. They would come up and shake his hand and the games they played were increasingly about his bravery and they would argue with each other about who would get to be Winstanley. That's not fair I was the bully yesterday. And there was fighting in these games but it was righteous fighting and these kids were modelling bravery for each other and it was heart-warming to see it. I'm Winstanley, Pow Pow. Have you had enough yet? And they would hold each other down and practice arm-locks, and bullying entirely ceased at that school and there was no mystery as to why it stopped, with everyone longing for the chance to fight against a real bully, and bullies in their cowardice would find nothing but defeat and ignominy there.

And if all of this was written deepest on the hearts of the smallest boys? And if they learned to hunger and to thirst after justice, and for the chance to wield it, and if this in time played out in the world and changed things utterly? Then that was of no consequence to Winstanley Jones. He had some hopes but he fought mostly for bravery's own sake, which as a courageous boy he felt himself bound to do, and if he tempered his own heart greatly and won great favour then he was not aware of the fact. And so he grew and he stored up many things, all the while imagining that there was no other way to be.

Time passed. Winnie turned eighteen and finished school and he went out the next day to find himself a job. His teachers tried to convince him to study and he said thank you but I don't think that will be my luxury. He found work with a bricklayer, who needed someone to mix mud and to keep him in bricks, and Winnie worked hard and the brickie treated him very well, after a week of testing him out to see if he was going to be a worker.

Winnie saved hard and soon had enough to rent himself a small place down by the river, a short bike ride from work and within easy reach of his grandparents. His furniture was basic and unmatched but he bought a nice big bed and he liked the space it gave him in the evenings, to come home to his own place and to cook a basic meal, of what was going cheap that week at the supermarket, and he even allowed himself an occasional beer that he chilled right down to freezing.

He went to visit his grandparents every week, and no matter how hard that was he still made himself go there, for stilted conversation and both of them looking like death. Sometimes both of them would be drunk when he got there and that made things difficult, especially when his grandmother turned spiteful and dropped her hints that things would be better if he had never been born. One

day Winstanley told her that he knew his mother had died from birthing him, but that he would gladly have given his life for hers if he could make that exchange. It was the first time he had really tried to explain these things but his grandmother turned vicious and swore at Winnie and told him that he was not welcome there and even spat in his direction. He left with her shouting curses at him out into the street, and as he cycled to his little place he resolved not to hate her for her anger, and resolved also to be grateful for his little place down by the river where he was allowed to be who he was without curses and imprecations being wished on his head whether he deserved them or not.

Winnie was kind and he visited his grandfather when he went into the hospital. When Winnie had left that day, hounded by curse words and hatred, the old man had breathed out a sigh of exhaustion with the world, and it seemed to everyone that he continued to breathe out and forgot completely to take another breath. He just seemed to deflate, and to go on sinking, until he ended up in hospital and even there he kept on breathing out. Winnie visited and snuck in a tiny bottle of his favourite scotch and he smiled still sinking further and said: Good Boy. And then he said through the side of his mouth: You are a good boy. They have told me to my shame and even your name shames me now. Your fate is not determined and much depends on your courage and all I can say is: do not yield to bitterness as I have done. And he sighed, and though he had more to breathe out there were no more words within him, and he held his silence until it was made absolute a week later and he breathed out finally and was still.

At the funeral Winnie was offered condolences by various distant relations and although he hoped and smiled there was no condolence there. His grandmother was there but would not look at him and when he told her how sorry he was she said: I know what you did to him. The ideas you put in his head. Well you can stay away and not work your voodoo on me. She turned her face away and he too turned away, but sadly, and it was only three weeks later that that a lawyer called and told Winnie that she too was

gone.

Now Winstanley Jones was not particularly brilliant and he had no special talents that anyone could discern, but he always had wonderful luck, if that is what it was. He sent goodwill into the world and helped people as much as he was able, and so people were attracted to him and wanted to help him and he attracted good things to himself without trying or any shred of avarice. He seemed always to have plenty of everything he needed, although living as simply as he did there was not much needed to sustain him.

One Friday a lady from the estate agents came by for an inspection, and he struck up a conversation with her and she found herself telling him things that she had never admitted to anyone, and Winnie was priest-like and yet also different from that, and he heard her confession and reassured her and without any superiority told her that he understood. She wept a little and then said Lord look at me and Winnie said: I think you look fine. They talked more and Winnie was very open and she found him very sweet.

What do you do for work? She asked.
I heave bricks.
That's a hard road.
I guess. But I'm strong enough.
Sure. Just let me show you something?

She dug in her file and came up with an advert for the rental of a small shop front in the City, opening on to a covered cobbled walkway with little restaurants and boutiques. This is a bargain, she said. I will give you a key and you can have a look at it. It is drab now but it is plumbed and wired and you could paint it easily. If you bought a coffee machine and you were good at it you would make a killing. You seem nice and people always respond to that. And of course to good coffee but you will work that out.

Winstanley Jones swung by the office the next day and took the key to have a look at the space. It was quite tiny, and quite as drab as she had said, but as he rolled the door up and open his bracelet pulsed and he saw it not as it was in front of him but he saw into the future and what it could become. He went straight back to the agent and paid the bond and rent in advance and the little space was his. The following Monday he gave notice at work, and his boss told him that his own brother was looking for work and that Winnie could finish that day if he wanted. His boss even gave him a week's pay in lieu and he said: I was not sure about you. But you've got guts and you worked hard. Good luck with the café and I might be by for a freebie.

Winnie opened that little cafe within the month. He picked up a coffee machine at auction, along with a whole collection of cups and other bits and pieces, and a friend plumbed it for him on the understanding that he would drink his coffees for free. Winnie then bought as many different beans as he could find, and he experimented for days until he settled on a blend and a grind and a temperature for the milk and he gave out free samples as he worked at them and people told him they were good.

So Winnie opened and only had one quiet week before the rush began to happen. He was fastidious about his coffee and he never compromised and people voted with their feet until he was almost too busy. He put up signs thanking people for their patience, saying that quality took time, and he put out numbered cards so that there would be no dispute as to who was next in line. Some people griped but most of them were happy to wait because they knew that this coffee was worth the wait, and they smiled ruefully at each other and said: I guess the secret's out about this place. And Winnie came to know them all by name, and they would confess loves to him and also sorrow and he would listen and say: sure. I think I know how you feel.

Winnie got busier. He pondered upon it and then advertised for a

Barista, saying: Love what you do? He had one applicant named Jason who turned out to be an even greater purist than Winnie, and on his second day he tweaked the pump pressure in the machine and the level of grind just slightly and said: now we gonna make us some coffee. He changed the milk to more expensive milk and Winnie protested and Jason said: I guarantee you that this will make all the difference, pardner. Jason had such precision on the machine that Winnie left him to it, and soon Winstanley Jones was engaged full time in taking orders and exchanging pleasantries and sometimes intimacies with his customers.

After a month of this Winnie sat Jason down and offered him a half share in the business, and Jason said he could not afford it and Winnie said: I aim to give it to you for free. Jason asked why and Winnie said generosity was a virtue and that Jason had become such a part of the business that it only seemed fair. Jason said he always heard about generosity and fairness but hadn't seen too much of it in practice, and Winnie smiled his crooked smile and said maybe it will catch on, one of these days. Winnie also warned that profit share was not a wage and that it would vary and Jason smiled and said: are you crazy? Just watch what we do now I am really on board.

So they shook hands and from that point both pitched in what they had and got cleaner and faster and better and customers swore that the coffees were getting better and better, and Winnie said that there were technical aspects that Jason was contributing but that the real secret ingredient in their coffees was love. Jason laughed whenever he heard that and would whoop out loud: Can you feel the Love? And customers would laugh and said that they could really taste it and that they would never go anywhere else for coffee and Jason yelled that we would be here until the machine explodes and Winnie smiled: with the way you are hammering out the coffees, that might be sometime soon, pardner.

Their coffees were good and people came from blocks away and that gave them some freedom in deciding what they would tolerate. Some people were rude either to Winnie or to Jason and if that happened his bracelet would pulse quietly almost as a reminder and Winnie would say: we do not accept rudeness here. You may have had a bad day, but please show us the same basic courtesy that we always show to you. That outraged some people – the sort who got their kicks out of treating service staff badly – but if they flared up Winnie would quiet them and say: you are no longer welcome here. Please move aside while we serve our respectful customers. They might try to argue but Winnie was firm and the other regular customers got used to seeing this happen and increasingly found their voices. Go somewhere else, they would say. You had a chance and you blew it, asshole. Now move on. You are not welcome here.

After a while a little restaurant space became vacant across the way, and Jason surprised Winnie with a proposal to open what he called a soup kitchen there. They decided to take the lease and they hired a quiet young chef and a smiling waiter and they opened to great interest for the lunch trade. The soup was made with the same care as their coffee, and the little place was soon brimming every lunchtime, and the blackboard changed daily with new soups and old favourites on the menu. After two months Winnie and Jason offered both newcomers partnership in the business, and while the chef snapped it up immediately the waiter said she would rather stay on a wage until she graduated and worked out what to do with her life. That was fine by them, and they spread it around that Cass was a struggling student and customers would tip her generously and give her advice on what to do after her degree. Cass wanted to split the tips but none of the others would take them, and so in the few hours she worked she made very good money and always gave it her all.

So the four of them worked every weekday. Winnie would keep an eye on things and he learned to look for Cass beckoning him over if a customer ever crossed the line. She had a thick skin but some people went too far and Winnie would come over and give them the

mail. Patrons soon learned to cheer as he came in, and they even began to shout the words with him: you are no longer welcome here. And it seemed that the more idiots they banned, the more good people would come in their place, until Winnie no longer had to throw anyone out and that part of the daily routine lapsed back into legend and memory. The punters began to smile outwardly and would talk to each other even though they were strangers, and laugh about what they had seen especially in the early days when idiots still came to eat. They all had different tastes and views but they all agreed that the soup could not be beaten in the city for quality or consistency or price, and they wrote grand praise in the comments book and started coming earlier and earlier to ensure they would have a seat. Across the way the coffee machine did eventually explode but Jason procured a brand new one and he bought himself a captain's hat and he started to har har har like an old sea dog on a tramp steamer, and when he made his toothless face and said me hearties with his face shrouded in steam the customers would shriek with laughter and say Jason you are crazy and he would reply: so the voices keep telling me. Winnie would laugh then and Jason would smile at him and say: I love it when you laugh, Winnie. There are things beyond sadness, you know.

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ONE busy day that was no different from any other day Winnie looked up to see a slight young woman with a heart-shaped face waiting patiently to be served. His bracelet seemed to pulse sharply but that may have been his heart leaping and pulsing one strange great pulse throughout the whole of his body, for this was no ordinary girl with a lovely heart-shaped face. As it is written: he knew who she was, in the instant that he saw her.

And Winnie knew who she was. The only problem was that he could not explain such a thing to her, for he had never seen her before, and because wisdom about such things has now entirely

vanished from the world. He could not explain but he could smile at her warmly and so indeed he smiled, and she smiled shyly back and he said with an air of great and gracious formality: and how my lady may I help you?

She smiled widely and said well how polite, and she asked most politely for a strong caffè latte with two sugars if that would be all right. He said that is the least I can do Madame and Jason raised an eyebrow and said I'll make this a good one shall I? And Winnie smiled a goofy grin and said certainly my good man as good as you are able. And he turned back to her and bowed.

Can I help you with anything else?
No, she smiled. I have coffee. What else could I need?

And when her coffee came she thanked them both and then she turned and merged back into the passing laneway crowd, a slight girl merging back in to that surge of anonymity like memory merging back into a dream.

To Winnie's delight the slight girl came back the next day, and she leaned in conspiratorially to him and said Mister I have something to tell you.

What is that?
Well. That coffee you gave me yesterday was the best coffee in the whole world.
Thank you.
I mean it. The. World.
Yes our Jason is very talented.
He is.
Can I ask you a question though?
You may.
Why are we whispering?

And she smiled and said: because you see I cannot let other people know about how good this coffee is. Then they would flock here,

and I would never get close to you again.

Winnie loved the very last part of what she said, and although she did not mean it as he might wish he still held those words tight to him and he rehearsed them in his mind all afternoon. I would never get close to you again. Meanwhile she ordered herself another latte, and though Winnie tried to give it to her for free she blushed and tutted at him and told him that it would be cheap at twice the price. He asked her whether he could help her with anything else and she said much as she had said that day before. I have this wonderful coffee. What else could I need?

She came by every day, the slight girl with the heart-shaped face, and she bought her one strong coffee, and Jason started to ask her whether she was feeling the love and she said not yet Captain but I will with that coffee in me. Winnie was unfailingly deferential and polite and also strangely formal, and he would call he milady and she would blush and he would say: I have offended you. And she would gush and say: O no please don't think that. It's just such a charming thing to hear. And they would always end their exchange with Winnie asking her whether he could help her further, and she would always give the same answer back to Winnie: what else could I need?

One day he was reckless and he waded in and said: I can show you what you need.
Pardon?
I can show you what you need.
And what pray tell is that? She looked at him quizzically, a hand on one hip.
I will show you tomorrow.
Is it another type of coffee?
No. At least I don't think so. I don't really know, to be honest. But when you come back tomorrow I will show you what I mean.
You're a strange boy, she said.

I know, he said.
But you are very charming.
Thank you.

All right. I will see you tomorrow. But I am coming for the coffee, mind. I really can't see how there could be very much else that I need.

That evening Winnie ate his dinner in silence, and tried to quiet a place in his heart to work out what more this beautiful woman could possibly need, especially from a goofball like him. He sat quietly through the long evening until the lounge room grew cold, and he went to bed and was also quiet there and wondered what he might show this wondrous girl when he saw her next.

In the middle of the night Winnie woke up with a start. He rolled out of bed and went to the kitchen table, and he started to write fast on a sheet of paper until his pace slowed and he gently set that paper aside and began to write slowly and deliberately on another sheet, and his bracelet began to pulse with his heartbeat and he wrote for about an hour and a half and ever so slowly he wrote. When he was finished he went back to bed and this time he was peaceful and quietly smiling as he closed his eyes and he went directly to sleep.

Winnie knew in a deep place of his that he would see her the next day, even though when he thought hard about his strangeness and boldness he knew there was a very real chance she would not come. But there was no need for concern. She arrived at her usual time and walked up to the counter and she smiled and she said: well? To which Winnie replied: let me get you a coffee and then I will show you what I have.

She smiled her usual smile and waited for the coffee, and while she waited Winnie debated with himself whether he should show her

what he had written. Jason peered at them both suspiciously and when he brought the coffee to Winnie he asked him quietly: you gonna drive this customer away? And Winnie said that he was not quite sure but if that did happen it would be entirely his own fault, and the fault of the strong feelings he had for her. Jason punched him gently and said: go for it, ese, and so emboldened Winnie put the coffee in front of her and then he brought out from his back pocket a creased envelope with an inscription on the front.

This is what I have, he said. I hope it is enough.
A letter, she said. Oh I love, love, letters.

He smiled at her and asked how she knew it was a love letter and she smiled and scolded him gently for being altogether too clever. He smiled and said mea culpa and she said that's even worse and he said mea maxima culpa and she laughed and told him to stop.

Winnie then went back to his other customers, who also needed coffee, and who then formed the vanguard of the mid-morning rush. He was dutiful and a bit harried and he did not see her sit at an empty table and begin to read what he had written. He did not see her smile fade and her face become soft, and he did not see the blush that came over her sweet face and the longing that it portended. He did not see her read and turn over the page and keep reading because she could not bring herself to stop. He did not see, just as she came to the end of the letter, he did not see the one single bright tear that escaped her right eye and fell with a soft splash on to the place where he had written his name, or see it bleed right across the heart that he had drawn next to his name in lieu of a formal signature. He did not see her sniff and blink and then quickly gather up her things and walk briskly back down the alley.

He saw none of these things. All Winnie saw, when he eventually looked over to her, was a cold unsipped latte that sat where she had been, and a quiet contained sadness that still lingered over that place, all from the memory of a tear and the sadness that had

brought it forth. He saw these things but mostly he saw that she was gone, and that her coffee remained, and in a sad heart-slump moment he shook his head and tried to shield his mind from the conviction that he had lost her.

Winnie was quiet and sad that day and in that night as well, but he faced up squarely to the fact that he had frightened her away and he knew that she was frightened by the things that he had written. He consoled himself with the thought that his chances had been slim in any event, and that he had done his best and been brave and written those things from his heart, and that bravely he must now stand fast by the consequences of what he had written. He also knew that he had promised her another letter, in the final paragraph of the last, and that he must deliver upon that promise even though she had left and would probably not return.

Winnie knew that his word bound him even in sorrow and later that night he sat down again and he wrote and his words came smoother and more gracefully, perhaps because he believed that they would never be read by anyone other than himself, and there was nothing to hide or to moderate and that night there fell from him many beautiful things. He wrote his words late into the night, and when he stopped writing it was because the clock chimed and he knew he could write this way without relent, and that stopping was merely to pause, and that perhaps from this day forth he would write in the evening of every single day in the hope that he might come to know her better through his writing, and perhaps even conjure her completely from his ardent desire for her, and the feelings that were renewed by that and made tangible by the best of his unlimited words.

The next day Winnie went to work again, his new letter poking out of his back pocket like the letter he had given her yesterday. He saw

his regular customers and one of them asked him if he was OK and he said yes, why, and the woman who was elderly said: you seem to be worse off somehow. I hope it is not of the heart. And he smiled sadly and said: is there any other true pain? And she also smiled and she said not for us poor humans and she also said that she would pray for him and keep him in her thoughts. He thanked her sincerely and she said: if only they were all like you Winnie. Things might have gone different for me, way back up the road.

Winnie thought that this was one of the saddest things he had ever heard and in his life he had been witness to some very sad things. He told the lady that he was flawed like everybody else and she said: but you admit it. He also said he would be a pain for anyone to deal with and she said there is good pain too and he laughed and he said I hope you enjoy your coffee Edith. And she paid him and said a grave farewell, and Winnie waved and turned back to serving his other customers.

As he served he did not notice the slight girl walk up to the end of the line and wait there patiently for him to serve her. She came without any fanfare and she moved up the line until she stood in front of Winnie, smiling. Winnie saw her then and he smiled but his sad expectation denied this moment as a possibility and he was left confused and unsure of what he was seeing until she tapped on the counter and said: Hello Winnie.

Hello, he said.
And kind reality flooded in.
She peered at him. Do you even know my name?
No.
It's Isabelle.
Hello Isabelle. I'm pleased to see you. I did not think you would come.

Neither did I, she said. And I shouldn't be here. But you said in your letter that you had more to tell me and I would dearly love to hear what more there could possibly be, after such beautiful words have

been written.

Winnie grinned and pulled the new letter out of his back pocket, smoothing out the wrinkles. He shook his head and held it out to her and she took it gently like it was a fragile living thing. I thought you weren't expecting me, she said. No, he said. But I made a promise to you and that bound me to write what you now have in your hands. And writing it brought you close to me, and as clear as you are here now.

Isabelle blushed and said you know you are an amazing writer and Winnie said: no. And he said: I knew a real writer once and he was something else. He was not much to look at but he could do much more than write out what is obvious to any decent person about love. Winnie smiled at that thought and he thought of little Shmuel and the tears on his red lashes, and his broad smile as that lady told him of his prodigious talent. Winnie hoped that these words were true and that Shmuel had been brave and that even now he might be writing and writing about love especially. Winnie also quietly hoped that Shmuel might write out this love he felt for Isabelle into some kind of luminous reality.

No, he said. I am no writer. I only transcribe. All of those things were already written, and I just copied out the words I found written upon my heart.

Isabelle gasped and said: see what I mean? And she said that there were no such words on her heart and Winnie said perhaps not but I feel Isabelle that there might even be greater words. She told Winnie that she felt like his words had summoned her here and he nodded and smiled and said: it could be something like that. But it is always your right not to come. And Winnie thought without speaking of the power of pure intention and of words inscribed upon hearts, and he thought of how little he really understood in this world and smiled again and said no more except a simple thank you.

Thank you for coming back, Isabelle.

Isabelle put the letter in her handbag and she told that him she wanted to be alone when she read it, and he said that he understood, and she said I don't know whether you do Winnie.

You made me cry the last time, she said.
I'm sorry.

Oh they weren't tears of sadness. I cried for something so beautiful. Just the thought that something like that might even exist in the world.

Jason handed her a strong coffee and smiled at her and told her joshingly that Winnie could be strange but that his heart was in the right place. She said she might become bewitched by this strange heart and Jason said that everyone seemed to change once they met Winnie and that he himself was no exception. She thanked both of them sincerely and put down her money and though they both said no in unison she said: I will not hear of it, and her money stayed put and she turned to go. As she turned she stopped and looked at Winnie and asked: should I come back tomorrow? And he said: please. I cannot compel you to come but it would really make my day. You are a very strange boy, she said, and walked down the laneway, slowly sipping her way towards the busy street outside, and then through the end of the laneway she was outside and onwards, on her way to wherever she was summoned to be in the world.

Time passed. Isabelle would come in every day and pay for her coffee and collect the new piece that Winnie had written in those evenings that seemed to him to get shorter the more he wrote. With every day that passed he found his heart more expansive and new words were found there written and he would transcribe them faithfully. Isabelle asked him once jokingly whether he employed

writers and he said gravely that the words were not his but belonged to every person the same and could be transcribed directly from the expansive Heart of Humanity, had people only the courage or the inspiration to look there for what is written.

Isabelle came in one day with a smile on her face and she said: I have something to show you Winnie. And she smiled and held up a huge scrapbook, and on the garish cover there was a title: When I Was Loved. She flipped the pages and she said it took me all night and that was mostly in re-reading and this morning I felt as fresh as though I had been newly moulded from the clay. That is your line not mine, she said, and at that Winnie looked puzzled and he said: I did not think that I had written so much as that.

He continued to write and Isabelle continued to come in to collect his letters, and to read them, and to paste them in the book that she was keeping for Winnie and also for herself. She was a bit brighter every day and her skin cleared and her hair shone and she asked Jason with her newly bright eyes: what are you putting in this coffee? And he said it's Love, little darlin', and she said that there was a lot of that going around and Winnie blushed and she said yes boy I mean you.

But it was not all hits and giggles. One day Isabelle arrived with her hand in the hand of a slim stooped man and Winnie was taken aback at that fact, but he was especially taken aback when he looked at this man and saw a shadow cross over his face, for it was a grim shadow and seemed a portent of some cruel horror that this man was heir to. Winnie looked away and pulled his face up into a smile and he looked at Isabelle and she looked terribly flustered and she said: Winnie I would like you to meet my fiancé Lucius.

Hello Lucius, said Winnie.

Lucius smiled an oily smile and he said: Lucius Dragani, how nice to

meet you. You must be this coffee boy I have heard so much about.

Winnie felt Jason bristle behind him and it was an obviously cruel remark but he tried to smile equably and he just said: Jason makes the coffee, with tremendous skill and care. I'm just here to make sure everyone gets what they need.

Fabulous, said Lucius. So it will be a short black for me and a macchiato for her. No Isabelle you will not have more milk than that. It plays merry hell with your complexion.

Jason turned fuming to the coffees and Winnie turned and said quietly to him: thank you Jason I just really need to keep this civil. Jason harrumphed and thought of spitting in the cup but he was a professional and he made good coffee for angel and asshole alike. Lucius drummed on the counter as Jason worked and after a minute he shrilled: Ready yet? I swear you can't get good help these days. And he laughed a throttled laugh and his eyes remained cold and when Winnie handed him the coffees Lucius gave him the exact change and said: see that you don't spend it all at once. And he ushered Isabelle back down the street without a word of thanks, and Isabelle hung her head as if she was greatly ashamed.

Isabelle came back the next day alone and she tried to apologise but Winnie held up his hand and said you did not do anything wrong. She told him that Lucius had been just awful, but she said that Winnie should not judge him merely upon that. He is just shy with new people, she said. He can be lovely sometimes. Winnie listened to her and then he said: Isabelle it's fine. He wanted to tell her about the shadow upon Lucius's face, and how it spoke of old and practiced cruelty but such a speech was not his right to make and in the end he did not say anything except: I have two letters for you. One for yesterday and one for today. She flushed and said she was sorry for that also and that Winnie was very sensitive in not giving the letter to her in front of Lucius and he said: I did not think that he would like that very much. She flushed deeper and said no and said Winnie I should talk to you about that and he said: I would

prefer that you read the letter and she nodded and said OK and Winnie said: sit down I will bring you your coffee.

Isabelle continued to come and there was no further sign of Lucius and Winnie continued to write, and it seemed to prove what he had guessed about all of this: that his heart harboured love in unlimited quantity, and also the limitless words of love. And each day that he handed her more words his heart became a more ready captive, and he was generous to most people and also brave but he knew that he would do anything for her, and if that were to die in her service and protection then he would gladly give his life in this way. He knew that he was just one man but also that he shared his heart and what was inscribed there with all people of courage, and that this is the true root of heroism. He longed for the opportunity to be heroic in protection of her and knew then also what every courageous heart knows: that this is the basic substance of what it is to be in love.

But such times also pass. Isabelle came in one morning looking worn and worried, and Winnie asked her to sit down and she sat. Instead of coffee he made her a chai with some fancy formula that he had in samples and he said: I think this might be better for you today. She smiled a wan smile and thanked him and as he walked back to the counter she grabbed his sleeve and turned him around and she said: Winnie I have something for you. He smiled and said so had he but she said: I cannot accept what you have to give me anymore. Please just take this, and please read it later when you have time and space. Winnie asked: is it bad news? And she said: I do not know what it is. And she got up and went to fish money out of her jeans pocket and Winnie protested as usual but she held a finger up to touch his lips and that quieted him and he was overcome and he would have clasped her to him but her eyes said no, and he knew in that instant that he would always obey her, even when he did not understand why she might command the things she commanded of him.

There is no other way, Winnie. I am so sorry.

And with that she was back down the lane and into the bright sunshine, and the letter burned in his hand and his lips too burned where she had touched them with her slight hand and he was torn with a dread and tender feeling, and as he got back behind the counter to the line of people waiting and looked at Jason standing ready at the machine Jason said: you OK pardner? Winnie replied that he did not know what he was, but he said that he did know that his people needed coffee. And so he turned and smiled as best he could and took orders and people took their drinks and thanked him and he said it is a pleasure, and he dispensed such mild relief to suffering secretaries and bookkeepers and shop girls and mail room boys, and he speculated upon love and knew as he had always known that to love was to do and not to have, and that even if his heart was to be broken he would still do the best he could to give people small kindnesses and mild relief from suffering, and even merely bear witness to people and their pain and their exultation, which seemed to him now to be the most important thing of all. He dispensed coffee that whole afternoon with as much warmth as he could muster from his rent heart and the people he looked after were satisfied anew, perhaps by such rare kindness plucked from the depths of overwhelming pain. These people complimented him and he accepted all of their kind words and he knew that it was true speech, but all the while he knew that he would trade it all for just one more word from Isabelle, even a harsh word; or a moment more of her finger lingering upon his lips, begging for silence and bringing peace and also some deliverance from the absolute constancy of words.

That evening Winnie sighed and laid out Isabelle's letter like the corpse of a dead mother, with all the careful dread in the world, and he read the words that she had typed out for him to read. His heart strained to find meaning beyond them or perhaps between their lines, but they were like ashes or bones and his heart found

nothing there to help him, and he was left only with the exact words that she had typed out, and he found these words terribly lean and unyielding.

This was what she had written:

Dear Winnie,

It was only as I sat down to write this that I thought of your name. I do not know if Winnie is your full name or just an abbreviation of something longer. In the short form it is a lovely gentle name and it suits you very well.

Winnie I have been crazy. I have gotten us into something that I never should have allowed to happen. I am to blame for that and so it is my burden to make it right. I want to do that without pain or disappointment for anyone, even though I am probably a little late. I am terribly sorry if I am too late to avoid pain in you.

I am to blame but those things you wrote for me, Winnie. This is no fault of yours but they said things that I could not resist. I know that they were only words but they were from such a loving place. I was surprised to find that I needed them so badly, and the more I read the more I wanted to read. I now see I was greedy but I would challenge anyone to read such things and not fall in love with them.

Dear Winnie you have such a beautiful heart. I know that, but I also know that the world does not work in such ways. And so I must stop this here and do no more harm to you or to my relationship. I am bound to Lucius, and I must honour that. There are so many reasons why he must be honoured, some even mysterious to me. I am just finding
out about him, even after three years, but from the day I met him I have known that I am his. His desire for me is very powerful. I cannot explain it any better than that.

There is not much more to say except: please keep writing When I

Was Loved. People so badly need to hear these things that you somehow know. It is too late for me but there might be others who may benefit. Perhaps younger people who have their choices ahead of them, and can choose how they wish to be loved. You must teach them that it is their birthright, and that they must not settle for anything less. And please: show them how they should love, really love, which is the most important thing of all.

Oh Winnie. I will miss that spark of kindness you surge from, and your huge bright boyish heart. Who knows what you might be able to achieve, with such goodness that is in you. I will pray that you achieve every good thing that you are capable of.

You have my admiration and my gratitude always, for proving to me that unbridled Love is. Thank you for your bold and loving courage in showing me all of this, at such grave risk to yourself. I am so sorry Winnie -

Isabelle.

Winnie read the letter over again and as he read it his confusion grew and he could not work out what she was saying, because although she wrote such clear prose she said contradictory things that he could not understand. Love Is, for example. That was true and he knew it because he had written it so many times to her and written it straight from his heart. Yet it was not for her?

He read and read again and he could not pierce her thinking. He wondered what the root of that mystery was and also what might keep her with a man who could not provide her with what she needs and deserves and moreover what she knows she needs and deserves. He thought of hope, and he knew that there was just hope and misplaced hope and he knew that wisdom was in fact to see the difference.

Winnie read and read and he went into work the next day on no

sleep at all and he was not fresh, he was green and his ship was down and he looked shipwrecked. Jason made him double-shot ristrettos and that kept him going but he was not a shadow of his usual self and customers kept asking him if he was OK. He would say: Love problems, I'm sorry, and they would sigh and say don't I know and wish him well and tell him that it would pass and what he had on his side was time. He didn't bother to contradict them, and he fixed a glazed smile on his face and although he knew Isabelle would not be coming in he still looked for her and he saw glimpses of her from time to time in the passing crowd and he would have called out but he knew as he went to call that the glimpse was false and that it was not her. He went in the next day and the next and although he looked for her even the false glimpses faded and he was left without any sign of her false or otherwise.

In the evenings Winnie still wrote. He bought himself some good heavy paper and with a heavy mechanical pencil he would write pages of quiet yearning things all for Isabelle, and all meant for her eyes to read, and perhaps even they were meant to loose just one more bright tear from her as she read and was overcome by what he had written. He fixed on just one theme - You Should Be Loved - and there was no end to the things that he found in his heart to say to her. He said many things some of which can be told and these are: you need someone to entrust you with their heart, Isabelle; to entrust it while knowing that you may break it, callously or carelessly. You deserve a man who can see this possibility and yet still give you his heart, wholly and completely. You know: all love is contingent upon that trust and also upon risk, and the very existence of love brings with it the knowledge that even the greatest love must also come to an end. So Winnie wrote and these words were of some comfort to him, for they showed him that his pain was direct evidence that he had loved Isabelle without any reservation, and that there was nothing in heaven or hell that could contradict this fact, and this knowledge grew in the heart that beat within him and his heart swelled a hundredfold with sadness and wisdom and a strange sore thankfulness and these things lived together within him, whispering to him quietly from the endless

reservoir that gave Winnie his love and his courage and which truly knew no bounds.

And time did pass. Winnie smiled more and business continued to boom and customers continued to take their comfort there and be heard, and they would joke with Captain Jason and compliment the quiet chef and tip Cass and happiness grew there amongst them, and although the world would divide them they were briefly united there and were of one people. This place shone brightly and was the light of people's mundane lives, and a refuge from the harshness that profit and loss seemed to bring into the world.

One day after closing Jason sat Winnie down and brought out a bottle of champagne and said: Winnie I have come into some money. Winnie was surprised and then happy and sad all together and he congratulated Jason and then said a little sadly: so then you are leaving? And Jason laughed and poured the bubbles and said of course not you goof what would you do without me? Jason said that he had put an offer to buy the coffee shop and the soup kitchen freehold and he said it looks like the sale will go through. Winnie laughed and said so you are my landlord then and Jason said no Winnie and then he said: I'm going to donate them to the business. Winnie smiled broader and said are you sure and he said I seem to be, although everyone I know thinks I'm crazy. Winnie said it wasn't necessary but Jason said: I feel I should match your generosity. And besides, I want this place emblazoned on the map for all time. We are good for people Winnie and they know it and I can't think of anything I might rather do.

So the business solidified in this way and they staged a Freehold Party to celebrate the fact, and that night the laneway was jammed tight with their regulars and various tag-alongs and although there was only laughter and dancing and no trouble at all they still got into terrible trouble with the council. Winnie went down the next day to smooth things over and he said: we only expected fifty

people. The haggard events co-ordinator told him that they needed a permit for any party even of ten people. They ended up with a hefty fine and they paid it and then put out a jar with a label that said Party Fine Fund and they recouped the money in a day and a half. People paid multiple times and then asked if they could pay in advance for the fine that would be levied after the next party. The poor old events co-ordinator became a regular customer, and Winnie told nobody that she was the Party Gestapo and he winked at her as she heard people planning future parties and she said: please stick to making coffees. My job is way too hard as it is.

During the party Winstanley had watched for Isabelle but although there were many other pretty girls there, even some with heart-shaped faces, there was not the one face that he so ardently sought. Jason got him drinks and he got quite sodden but his heart was sore and he felt ancient and in the end he decided that he would have an early night. He pressed through a ring of girls to find Jason and told him that he was going home, and Jason grabbed his face tight and said: I love you man. Look after yourself. The girls caught on and begged him not to leave, but Jason was stern and said that it was his right to go, and Winnie mouthed thank you over the shouting and the music and then he was no more.

When Winnie got home he showered and drank stale coffee and he sat down and wrote another letter to Isabelle, and although he did not begin it as goodbye it very soon turned into such a letter as that. He told her of his manifold feelings for her and how they had been written upon his heart in some long distant time, and that he had known who she was in the instant that he met her. He said that he bore no ill will towards her but that a grave heart-sickness was upon him, and that turning away from her was necessary for him in order to carry on in the world because there were people who needed him to carry on. He thanked her for showing him what love really was and he ended by saying: if you ever need me Isabelle you need only cry out my name and I will be there for you, because I will surely hear that cry in my heart and it will guide me directly to you. I will always heed your wishes absolutely and I will always,

always fight for you and protect you, and I will never surrender you to danger until the light in my heart is extinguished. He then drew a heart and wrote his name and he saw a single tear drop to the page and roll into the centre of that heart, and from the centre of that heart he did not wipe it away. He rose and gathered his last letter along with the others stacked on his desk, and he put them all into a file that he marked also with a heart and with these words that were his own words in that they were written on his heart, and written on every other kind and courageous heart in the world: You Should Be Loved.

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THERE are paths and ways in the world that we cannot imagine, and also ways external to the world and such things that travel upon them. In time they convey all things to their proper place, and although Winnie wrote his words truly and without any other motive all words have their place, and so sped his words towards those places and such consequences as awaited them there.

And so one night Winnie woke with a dire feeling that danger was pending, and that feeling was made more urgent by the knowledge that burst in him that this danger was not for him. He knew also who was in danger and he threw off the covers and pulled on yesterday's clothes and with his jumper backwards he sprinted out his front door and down the side of his little house and out into the street. His bracelet all the while burned into his skin.

Winnie had never been one to run but this night he strode out fast with long strides in the direction of peril. In his haste he let go of any idea of limitation and he ran faster and then impossibly fast and still he continued to accelerate. He found infinite reserves of speed in his body and there were people he passed that night who were disturbed by his passing and yet could not say afterwards what it was that had rushed by and swept their coats around them

and blown their hair about. Winstanley Jones felt time stand still and then even perhaps go backwards and at that he ran even harder, hoping that he could reverse time enough to make this present danger a thing of mere possibility, and not a terrifying present reality.

Winnie turned down a quiet wide street with blurs that were plane trees and expensive automobiles and he pulled up and came to a halt outside of a double-fronted house with bay windows and blood-red leadlight. He went up to the door and touched the lock and heard it snick back and he did not stop to marvel at that. He strode directly into the house, towards the back room where some dim lights were on, and he could hear the sound of sobbing and scuffle and he knew that there was prophecy in what he had written that recent night, that this danger would not make him surrender but it may very well put out the light in his heart. Winnie was terrified but still he strode directly towards the danger and he knew again, just for an instant, that he was going to face Death and that Death might take him, but he also knew what courage required of him and he waded in without a thought of cowardice or any inducement within him to take a backward step.

Winnie strode into the back room and hesitated for an instant in the doorway. He saw Isabelle and his love flared in him but in that same moment he also saw Lucius and the darkness that had come upon him, and he saw this new Lucius with his strength grown immeasurably. A huge shroud of darkness around Lucius whorled in a sickening manifestation of dread and it struck terror in poor Winnie's mind. But in the grip of that terror he also saw the knife that was at Isabelle's throat, a demonic curved blade dredged from nightmare imagining of cursed and banished things, carved of jet or obsidian or some strand of pure terror. Winnie felt his heart clutch and it quailed but he had faced danger before and he knew no matter how terrible it was his duty to face it, and to save poor Isabelle from that blade, and he knew from long experience that he

must wade in directly towards that danger, and show such courage or recklessness that that the horror would be drawn upon himself and away from poor Isabelle.

Let her go.

Both animal and prey looked up at him as he said that, and he saw terror in Isabelle's eyes and something putrid and unnatural in the eyes of the thing that tormented her. Those foul eyes flared red and a horrible leer came over its twisted face, the vicious smile of a practiced sadist, a thing that luxuriated in having supremacy over another living thing. Winstanley saw that terror and still he waded in.

Let her go.
Deal instead with me.
Now, Lucius.
Let her go.

Lucius Dragani looked at him, and the leer on his face spread and it became some death-mask of terrible and debased pleasure. Gladly, he said, a profane effigy of politeness. I am only permitted to deal those who invite me to deal with them. As he released Isabelle he laughed and said: she was safe, Little Winstanley. I was never going to kill her. But now you have challenged me, and you must already know this in your heart: I will kill you this night, after I have had my fun with you.

Lucius released Isabelle and she dropped to the floor, and she was frozen for a second and then she crawled desperately over to Winnie. She clutched at his legs and said: please Winnie. You heard him. Please leave me he cannot hurt me anymore. Please. But Winstanley looked at her face and saw bruises and a busted lip and also livid crosses that seemed to have been burned into both of her cheeks. Dragani saw him look and said: you like my little improvements? And Winnie's heart flared and he held her face close to his and he held it gently and he said: Isabelle. I need you to listen

to me. I have challenged him now and that was my mistake. But it cannot be undone. Isabelle began to sob and say no Winnie but he hushed her and said: I want you to get behind those benches. Stop up your ears and keep your eyes tight shut. Can you do that for me? You must not look, no matter what you might hear. She shook her head but he said please Isabelle and she staunched her tears and nodded and said: are you sure? And he said No but I do know you cannot see this. She kissed him on the lips and said Winnie you are a good brave man and his heart leapt with pride at these words, as they were words he had been longing to hear for all of his life. He was charged by those words and also thankful, and kissed her straight back and smiled no peeking and she nodded and then crawled fast to the bench cupboards and held herself very still.

Winstanley rose again and faced Lucius Dragani, and as he looked at the man he saw him swell and blacken until his human form was concealed behind a miasma of darkness that was both obscene and impenetrable. Winnie looked and was newly dismayed but he felt Isabelle's kiss still on his lips, and he was fired by that and he did not stand down. He looked and he knew that this was no man but he did not know what was actually before him until the Darkness itself supplied the answer, with these bleak words that seared into his mind and they were terrifying words.

You know who I am.
Yes known by many names.
So am I called: Accuser. Slanderer.
But so much more than these names.
Look upon me, and be dismayed.

These words were uttered by the dark shape with no mouth to utter them, and Winstanley heard them rasp and saw in him like bone upon absolute rock. The Darkness coalesced until it also became absolute, and Winstanley stood bravely but he could not see what it was he stood against, only a huge dark void at the place where the centre of the room had been.

So, the coffee boy, the Darkness said. With his love letters. When I Was Loved, is that it? I found your letters today, coffee boy. She had been hiding them from me. I dealt with her for her deception, as I will deal with you for desiring that which I alone may possess.

Isabelle stop up your ears, Winnie yelled.

How sweet, said the Darkness. You do not want her to hear you die. But I promise you boy that death will be slow in coming, and she will hear you scream before she hears you die. And by the time you die boy I swear to you that you will be beyond caring.

No, said Winstanley.
No? The demon laughed. I see your mind, coffee boy. I know your thoughts.
I deceived you, said Winnie.
You deceived me?
Yes, he said. The truth is: I don't want her to hear you die.

The Darkness laughed then and it shook with laughter, and its mirth was savage and it seemed to come from a dead place that lurked deep in some unknown parts, a fathomless briny trench beyond the knowledge of the world. Winstanley tried to posture again but he saw that deception was not his weapon to wield, and that the mind of this deceiver was infinitely more cunning than his own mind. Winstanley faltered and the Darkness howled vile with laughter, and he knew that he should not attempt to meet this duplicitous being on that field. Winstanley then stood quiet, and after the laughter had passed the Darkness spoke again.

Do you know who I Am, coffee boy? Do you know what I portend? By the depths of fear and hatred was I begotten, and by the fear of the world am I maintained. I know your fears, and I have drunk deeply from the cup of your suffering. Coffee boy, open your mind to me. Let me show you who I Am.

Poor Winstanley tried to close his mind but there was no latch that

could hold the Darkness out from that place. And he had known suffering and terror before but there was nothing to account for the horror that he was shown in that instant. Every debased and creeping thing, every vicious notion dressed in fine words. Every man's hand turned against his own life, every waste full of madness and suffering. He saw every howling void, every desire to suffer or to inflict suffering and the dread kinship between these things. He saw every river that has ever flowed with blood, every religion ending in madness, every innocent massacred without massacre and bloodshed ever ceasing. He saw brave men cut down savagely for speaking the truth, and whole glaciers of human blood grinding the world down to nothingness, amid a terrible gnashing of teeth. Finally Winnie saw words, whole mountains of words. He saw bald lies fabricated from lying words, and he saw that the world was held utterly in their thrall, and that evil only ever came into being through the bitter corruption of words. He also saw words of bitter accusation: that all of his courage was merely self-importance, that altruism never was, and that anything he ever gave he gave solely to aggrandise himself, and was a gift to himself and himself utterly.

Do you see?
The Darkness spoke again.

Am I known to you? Then fear me, coffee boy. Do you see? They chose you, and I have lured you here so that you might be destroyed. And when I have reduced you, and overthrown you, I will set your hand at her throat, so that you may again know what it is to kill the very thing that you love.

Winnie felt accusation and terror rise in him, and he feared that they would soon overthrow him just as the Darkness had promised. He tried to press the fear down but he could not press it down. The Darkness tried to master his fear, to drive it deep into his soul, but Winnie was no common receptacle for fear. As the fiend sought to cleave the terror to him it faltered, and found that terror could find no purchase within this strange man before it. Winnie saw this happen, the terror rise and drain away, and he saw at once that that

his fear was a pilgrim thing, and that it would merely reside within him temporarily. The Darkness snarled and then raised its hands, if so they could be called, and with some black and throttled speech whipped up a pestilent dark fire around itself. The fire whorled, and then with imprecations and a great hurling effort the Darkness threw that fire wholesale and without limit at the body of poor Winstanley Jones.

Winnie closed his eyes and felt the black tide hit him, and then blow through him with a slashing, vicious intensity. Winnie felt worn away and cut to pieces, and he grew faint and he shuddered, and he wondered if this might be what it is like to die. But as he prepared himself for death, and grew ready to fall on this field, a small thought grew within him and it was: I have nothing to fear from death. I am a good man, and I have always have done my best. Moreover, what I did not do well I always sought to make right. The foul wind through him eased and he also knew this thought: there is more than this in the world. There are more powers than just this overwhelming Darkness. And he knew that the Darkness was constrained just as other powers are, and he wondered at those constraints and saw some audacious possibilities. The wind began to blow itself out and Winnie opened his eyes. When he looked down at himself he saw that his skin and his clothes were covered with a glassy black dust, and when he looked back at the source of the knife-wind he saw the Darkness shudder in a moment of doubt. And for just one moment Winnie knew: the Darkness was afraid.

But the Darkness was not finished with him yet.

It rasped: you have one last chance, Winstanley Jones. I will spare you if you will submit to my absolute dominion. I have crushed this man Dragani but you will bear my weight better. With me you will subdue all and conquer all, and your name shall become immortal. Do not throw away your life, coffee boy. Do not have me kill you, and then strangle her by your own hand. Bow down to me, and worship me, and you will live forever. I offer you what all men crave: dominion over this world, and all things that are within it.

As it spoke the Darkness waxed soft and coy, and it cajoled Winstanley Jones. Winnie saw all that could be subject to his dominion, and he saw himself as prince and potentate and lord over all things. He saw himself chiefly as a terrifying ruler, and saw all men bowed to him. He saw all of his enemies laid waste, even old enemies whom he thought he had forgiven. He saw himself as sovereign superlunary and all people worshipped him, and he saw Isabelle in every guise and costume he could imagine, and some that he could not imagine, and she came to him in ardent compulsion and worshipped him with her hands and hair and gave over her body for his use. He saw himself wield all power over her, even unto death.

Winnie saw all of these things and they were terrible and majestic but he did not feel desire for them, and he was not overborne by them. He saw himself lonely on his throne, dealing death and injustice without ceasing, and he was puzzled by all of that, and his puzzlement turned to certainty and he saw that these things were merely dust and nothingness. He also saw that they were his to take for all of his life, and that he had not taken them, and that he would not take them now.

All of these things occurred in a part of Winstanley that the Darkness could not perceive. It was dependent upon favour that Winnie had heaped up in a place outside of the world, and these things occurred largely there and not within in this limited world. The Darkness only saw him silenced, and then ready to speak, and the Darkness was sure of his corruption and thus bade him speak, but Winnie was not corrupted and he drew strange speech from those outside places and this is what he said.

Accuser, Slanderer. I do not know who you are. My life has not been lived in the presence of your kind. But I know: you are a vile and savage being. You were loved by this woman and you enslaved her, and now as she would escape you would murder her and also anyone who would protect her. You are a coward and a bully, and

anyone with the light of knowledge in them would mock you and despise you.

And Winnie spoke further, further words that surprised him, and they speared out bravely into the Darkness that had bade him speak.

Hear this. I will not bow down. That is a desire of a pervert and a tyrant, to have a man kneel. I am just a man but I am no less than that, and I refuse to bow down. Rather: I have the courage to stand against you, which burns as a light in my heart. And with that Winnie finished what he was given to say, and the Darkness pulsed black with outrage.

Ha! How brave, with your precious little light. But you are a mere candle, boy. You cannot even light your own way. How then do you presume to confront me? I am the Morning Star. Hear that, and be dismayed. I was called Lightbringer, and the light that I bring burns both cold and terrible. It is lethal to human hearts. You are a guttering wick, without anyone to love you. And you still have the temerity to confront Us? We, who are Legion? You would stand against Us? You, whom no one loves?

Winnie wanted to plead that Isabelle loved him, but the Darkness saw his mind work at that thought and it spat this foulness at him: Fool, we sent her to you. So that you would come to Us, and be destroyed. We know: girl-bait is the best bait for hopeless dreamers like you.

The Darkness died back then and shrank until the figure of Lucius Dragani became apparent once more, and all of the darkness around him drained into the cruel curved dagger that he held. Lucius opened his eyes and they burned blood-red and he smiled a cold smile and he pointed the dagger at Winstanley Jones and he said: this is for you, coffee boy.

The dagger pulsed black, and from it issued a cold dense ray of

accusation that pierced Winnie terribly without seeming to pierce his skin. Where that ray touched it burned him and slandered him, and every part of him was burned cold by this vileness, and he was turned against himself. The cold sought his tender places, and it lingered there and burned there, and it burned worst of all when it touched a spot of doubt or anger or fear. Winnie closed his eyes and he saw now that there might be worse things than death, and he longed to enter that silent realm without any further suffering. But the Darkness intended merely to torture him now, and maintain his life for that purpose, and only later to bring death when all possible pain had been suffered by Winnie, and his every nerve exhausted and used up and burned. Winnie suffered torment beyond the reach of cruel words, and time ceased to move and even turned backwards upon itself. The suffering that Winnie knew became eternal suffering, and he knew what all hell-realms were like and he was interred there and he suffered. The Darkness suspended him in agony without time, and it laughed when Winnie cried out that all he wanted was to die. The Darkness laughed, and it laughed hardest when it saw Winnie's eyes brim with tears, and when tears fell upon his face.

But there are more things in the world than even this Darkness could dream. Such things as the merit of courageous men, and what resources they might have within and without the reach of this world. The Darkness was ignorant of such things and it foundered badly upon that ignorance. The tears that fell from Winnie were not tears of cowardice or self-pity. They were simply tears of suffering: suffering endured, and taken upon a self willing to retrieve others from their suffering. Winnie wept his own tears but also the limitless tears of other beings, who wept vast rivers of tears at his suffering and his bravery, as they cried out in the wilderness for him to be delivered. They wept and longed to take his agony upon themselves, if only that were permitted to them.

And there were other things. Winnie's tears fell as suffering made palpable, but they also fell as balm and as liniment, and that salve trickled into his heart and opened his heart very widely, creating even more space in him for bravery. He no longer sought death, and

he knew that he must fight this Darkness and that he was not yet doomed to die. He knew he must fight with the strength that he had, even though he had no idea how he should fight and with what weapons. He was ignorant of many things but he knew that his mind was prey to the Darkness and that his mind was of no use in this campaign. Winnie closed his mind down, and he saw the absolute importance of this one simple thing, and without thinking any further he saw that he should speak words directly from his heart. He looked there and saw all of the words he had written to Isabelle, and he saw that there were also formidable words within him along with so many tender ones. None of these words were strange to him, and he spoke deliberately and his words cut directly through his fear and this is what he said.

I am dearly loved. Even if that is just my own delusion, it is born of my certainty that I am worthy of love. And I have also loved, deeply and constantly. That is my main strength: what flows from within me, rather than towards me. My love is vast and acute and has been greatly tested by the years, and it has prevailed and prevailed utterly.

Winnie saw that these words were true words that the Darkness could not assail, and he read more deeply of them and continued to speak them and so he said the following.
Slanderer. Accuser. You saw my words, which are these very words, written out page after page, and yet you merely burned hateful and jealous. You did not understand what you were reading. These words that burned you are not only my words. They are words that are inscribed upon every human heart, and when in past times they would issue forth they were recognised as prophecy. They accuse you as a fiend and an abomination. You hurt an innocent woman, and you exulted in that cruelty, and with that you lost any claim you might have to mercy. What is more: you hurt a woman who has the love of a courageous man, who now stands before you to accuse you, and slander you, and to bring vengeance down upon your hatred and your corruption.

Winstanley opened his eyes and saw the cold ray burn his last dark places thorough agony to nothingness, and he saw himself purified by this fire in a way the Darkness could not have foreseen. His last dark place burned and was gone, and the ray now seared directly through him without any further place to catch or burn. The cold fire burned colder and colder without touching Winstanley Jones, until there was no more cold that could burn in it, and the ray sputtered and was then snuffed out entirely.

Winstanley rested a moment and then took courage again, and he looked again to his heart for the words that were written there. As he looked now he saw whole vast volumes at once, and they shone like cut stone, uncovered now by that purifying fire. Winnie looked at them and he saw what words they contained, and he knew that the Darkness did not intend to unite him with such words as he found in these tomes. There were loving words but also words of power and righteous fury, sanctioned from ancient times to banish and destroy evil merely in the hearing. Winnie saw all these words at the same time, and he rejoiced in them, and he knew for the first time what the power of words might really be. And he drew deeply from these words, and they rang out like bells, and this is the essence of what he said.

Fear me, demon.

Winstanley was bold and he spoke further from those words.

Fear Me. I am a custodian of the Word, and I command such legions of might and fury as your cowardice could never imagine. There are sacred scrolls in my heart, and they prophesy with unrelenting prerogative that you will be destroyed this very night, if only I will show courage.

I assure you, Demon: I have terrifying courage in me. Gaze upon me and tremble, for there is no hope for you.

The demon cackled and snarled, and it laughed at the words that

Winnie spoke, but only because it lacked the capacity to imagine the origin of his words, or what authority they might bear. Winnie saw this ignorance and shut his mind down further, and he spoke further truths.

You rule the mind, he said. Your mandate is deception. You have no knowledge of the heart, or how the Heart of Humanity is participated in by all men and women of courage. You sneer at the heart as weak, as you feed on the hearts of lonely women and greedy little men. I will now show you what Love looks like, and you will be relieved of your delusion. Know this, Demon: you shall see the face of Love and it will be terrible for you. You will be utterly dismayed.

And with that Winnie went down further inside himself, all the way down to the tiny light in the small of his stomach. As the demon laughed Winnie looked at that light without flinching. He knew that it was small, just as the demon had said, but so too was it beautiful, because it was the original source of all of his courage and love. He saw that this light was love but not as need, love in its pure crystalline form, born of his own willed actions in the world and utterly pure for that fact. It shone out at the fact that he had always loved so deeply, despite never knowing love himself. But as he saw that he also knew that he had been loved intensely by his mother, even in the instant of her death, and he knew his real name also for the first time in his life. He wept to think of her singing to him as she died: oh my darling oh my darling. He knew that this bright scintilla of love had always shone through him, and that he had replicated it to the point that it was now as densely packed as a star. He saw his vast love and knew it might shine without limit, if only he would allow it the space to shine within him. He also knew that whole choirs of angels were with him even now, and that the whisper of their love from so far away had buoyed him in his darkest moments. He knew they had wrung their hands with every blow that he had suffered, and that they wept tears of great winnowing sorrow in those times that he had been broken almost past repair. He knew they had wept as he had lost his will to press

on, and especially when his courage had failed him, when he knelt down weeping upon the earth and wet the earth with his tears.
He looked now with new eyes at that light shining within him and he knew that it had shone more intensely with his every kind word or deed or thought. And with the bonds of ignorance finally severed he saw that this light in him was truly without limit, and only ever constrained by his doubt, and he felt fierce courage and pride come upon him. That pride swelled within him and he knew that he was a fine man, and that light burst like a roman candle and spread into every corner of his being. It swelled and continued to expand, and it illumined him to the point that the light was limited no more and it reached out infinitely within him. It shone through all of the sadness he had known, and it expanded especially in his heart, growing like a cool white sun that could illuminate every heart in the world. He felt the light reach out from his bones and through his skin, and brightly dissolve even that illusory barrier between himself and the Heart of the World. And his light shone in the darkness, and the Darkness did not comprehend it.

I am the Lightbringer.
This thought formed directly in the centre of his being.
I am the Morning Star.
All human beings are heir to this Light.
This is the Light of the World.

Those thoughts resounded in every corner of the room and even in the mind of poor Isabelle, who was crouched down blocking out every sense that she could. They resounded like a struck gong in the mind of the Demon, and the Demon recoiled terrified from this new man of light. The light struck such terror in that foul mind that fear resounded in the room like a thunderbolt. The Demon tried to laugh but that sound was choked out of it, and Winnie saw the Demon shudder and he knew that the Demon was utterly dismayed.

Winnie pressed home his advantage, and let more thoughts resound in the room.
You are an impostor.

You cultivate lies and you profit from them.
Deception is the only weapon you have.
Now I will show you what weapons I possess.
Prepare to be destroyed.

When Winnie opened his eyes again the room was bathed in light, and he gazed at the dark being he was facing and saw it swell up in fear. It reared and postured terribly back at Winnie but the light was now irresistible, and it shone out into every dark corner of the room, and he saw shapes that seemed like imps or incubi scattering and dissolving. Winnie fixed his gaze on the coal-black eyes of his foe, and as they lit up like embers the foe hissed and screeched but it could not avert its eyes from the bright eyes that held them. The pure light searched out every corner of its being and the Darkness could find neither succour in that light nor any escape. Winnie looked into those black eyes with the light of wisdom and justice and he saw nothing of any substance, just blank fear and deception and the desire to feed upon fear. As he search-lit the swollen form of the dark being ahead of him Winnie also saw hatred, and the agglomeration of corrupt human desire, which in this bright light merely turned hazy and then disappeared. Winnie saw that this Darkness had hunted him for all of his life, and he knew also that it hunted every person in the world, especially men of goodwill who bore such great light in their hearts. He knew that there was nothing more to fear, and that any brave soul could shine and damn this demon utterly to destruction. Winnie again fixed his gaze upon those terrible eyes and the beast shook and screeched horribly. Winnie nodded calmly and knew what was to come, and there was no exultation in him but neither was there remorse. He just breathed in and breathed out and thought of his grandfather and said just a single quiet word in his heart.

Goodbye.

And with that a white-gold spear of light barrelled out of his heart towards the Darkness, hitting the demon squarely in the chest, or where the chest of such an abomination might be. The light hit and

exploded in spearlets and fine tendrils of light that sought out every dark corner of that being, and they turned everything to luminous apparition and then to dust blown nothingness. Winnie saw his own light shine back at him and join with him again, and he saw indeed that all light was truly one light, and before his eyes the beast slowly disintegrated. It wavered and was gone, and its howl of anguish tapered off to nothing more than a tape-hiss memory of itself, that soon also disappeared into the silence.

As the last of the Darkness blew out there stood the form of Lucius Dragani, back to his shrivelled human form, wasted from his utter devotion to the deceiver. It had also promised him dominion over the world, and it had lied to him and fed on him just as it fed on every fearful soul. Lucius had succumbed to flattery and been consumed, all the while imagining himself as the next ruler of the world, and a terribly dark reign that would surely have been. But this pretender had now been abandoned by the Darkness that had so groomed him and flattered him, and now clutching at his withered human flesh he convulsed wildly and screeched for help but there was no help for such a creature. As the light surrounded him he gasped for breath, but he was so accustomed to breathing hatred and spite that he might have been breathing underwater. The light in Winnie faded back upon itself until his chest was only faintly luminous, and the shrivelled form of Lucius Dragani slumped to the floor and was quiet, his vile tongue stilled, and Winnie knew that there would be no more lies even from this practiced mouth. He saw also that Lucius was entirely laid low, and would never form himself in heart or mind around any dark word again.

Winnie was still for a moment, as the light quieted down, and then he turned his attention towards Isabelle. She was still sitting behind the kitchen bench, with her eyes tight shut and her hands over her ears. He squatted down in front of her and took her hands in his, and he told her that she was safe now and that she could open her eyes. She looked at him intently and said that she was afraid with

the light and the noise that there had been a fire. Winnie said no just some fireworks and she nodded and said I heard them.

Winnie still felt some darkness shrouding her, and as he looked he noticed the engagement ring on her finger, and now seeing the glinting diamond for what it was he said gently: Isabelle. You need to leave something behind. He reached for her left hand very gently, and as she started to pull back he said: I need you to trust me Isabelle. This will make you feel better. Trust me. Winnie saw her relax back as he said that, and she said in a tiny voice I trust you Winnie and he lifted her hand and looked at the ring upon her finger. It was a big diamond, and he knew precisely of its provenance and what it was capable of, but he was very light and courageous and he began to slide it off her finger. At its mere touch he was sickened, and had awful visions of cruelties wrought by his own hand in some horrifying alternate reality, but his heart lit up again brightly and he saw how this also was the very heart of deception. He pulled the ring hard and rid her of the diamond and as he set it down on the counter she blinked and shook her head and said: that feels better. He took her hand again and he said: that ring belongs to him and it was never yours and it bound you and she said: is that why I feel… light? Winnie said that there may be another reason and he helped her up and showed her Lucius lying strewn on the parquetry. She gasped and said: Oh my God is he dead? Winnie said: he is still breathing, if that is what you mean. But I don't think that the old Lucius is going to come back again. She asked what had happened and Winnie said he was forced to face himself and she said that Lucius always loved to look in the mirror and Winnie smiled and said: he didn't find it so great this time.

Winnie also said: There are strange things in the world, Isabelle. More strange than you or I can imagine. But you should know: he cannot hurt you anymore.

Isabelle started to shake and even swoon a little and Winnie called for a cab to take her to hospital. As he carried her out to the car the

driver raised his hands and said whoa whoa whoa but Winnie said: a man has hurt her, and I need to take her to emergency. The driver said sorry let's hurry and held the door and then drove them quickly to the hospital. When they arrived Winnie thanked him sincerely and the driver said: I can wait if you need me to. Winnie smiled and said that will not be necessary you have done enough and the driver said: I have a wife, daughters. If this would happen to them I would also want help. And I would want to kill the man who did this. You call me if you want help with this too. Winnie said that the man would be no more trouble, and the driver looked at him intently and said: we need more men like you. But still you call me if you want any help. And he pressed a tatty card into Winnie's hand and drove off into the night.

Isabelle waited patiently with Winnie and as the night wore on he put a cushion in his lap and let her sleep. She slept a little and then was called into the rooms and Winnie had to wait outside and fill in a statement for the police. He wondered what to say about the confrontation and all he said was: Lucius Dragani hurt Isabelle, and then he attacked me. I am not a fighting man, but he came off second-best. And he signed his name and he smiled a little to know that this was as much as anyone would ever know of the events of that night, for he knew that words were different from events and that there were some events that were not matched by any words. He thought of the words he had just written and thought that they would do as well as any other words, so far as describing that battle.

The doctor patched up poor Isabelle and put a bandage on each lovely cheek and she said: the burns are superficial and will heal, but the man who did this is inhuman and must be prosecuted. Winnie said that he had made a police statement but that the man was probably insane, and the doctor sighed and said: so we must treat him. But on no account let her go back there, not even to get her things. Winnie said that he would take her somewhere safe and the Doctor nodded and said: I can see you are a kind man. We need more men like you. Winnie told her that he had heard that line

before and the doctor shrugged her shoulders and said: It's not a line. The reason people say it is because it's absolutely true.

So Winstanley Jones took Isabelle back to his little house by the river, and he made her tea and fed her a little soup that he had brought home with him, and when she had eaten she longed for sleep and he made up his bed with clean linen. He put her into bed and she protested weakly and asked: where will you sleep? But she was asleep before she heard the answer. Winnie unrolled a sleeping mat at the foot of the bed and he lay there awake for a long time, lulled by the slow lift of her breath and the sweet smell of her hair that hinted itself to him even from that far away.

When morning came Winnie got up quietly and got ready for work. He made a pot of oatmeal with banana and left some for Isabelle, and he wrote her a short note telling her to make herself at home, and that he would be home at four but that she could call him if she needed him earlier. He also left her a key and a fifty-dollar note in case she needed to buy anything. And as he rode down the river path towards work that morning he could swear that he was flying, and he flew through work also and people found themselves lit up by him and they said: you seem different, somehow. And he nodded and he said that Love was back in his life, and they offered their sincere congratulations and Jason whooped as usual and he said: can you feel the Love? And Winnie hushed him but he kept whooping and Winnie finally said: Jason. I feel the Love. And Jason punched him gently and said: I know you do Winnie. I only ever wondered how long it was going to take you.

Winstanley Jones came home from work to find Isabelle sitting on his couch with her feet tucked under her, reading a slim book of poems. He knelt down by her and looked into her eyes and asked her how she was feeling. OK, she said. A bit sore. But the dizziness

has gone. Winnie set about getting some dinner on and she read quietly, and as they sat down to dinner she took his hand across the table and said: I don't know how to thank you.

You can thank me by eating, he said.
And so she ate.

Winnie slept at the foot of the bed again that night, and for a week or so afterwards. Isabelle protested each night and wanted to trade places, but he was firm and said: I like it here on the floor. She would sigh and give in but she was secretly glad to have the softness of the big bed underneath her, and the warmth of good goose down above. She slept much and recovered quickly and one night as they settled down to sleep she asked: how much do you like it, on the floor?

Why do you ask?
Oh. Well there is also room in here.
Winnie flushed. Do you mean....
I think so. Don't get too comfortable, though. I might change my mind.

Winnie lifted the covers and slid into bed on the opposite side from Isabelle, and as he lay on that far edge she reached over and touched his hair. You don't need to be scared, she said. Winnie moved a little closer to her and she said good boy keep going and he said: I'm a little nervous Isabelle. She laughed softly and told him that this was a common problem and she moved close to him and against him and he closed his eyes and was transported by her touch upon him, and yet she was not even nearly finished. Her hands moved as well and he sighed and turned to her and his breath caught on itself and became ragged and she laughed even softer and said: I guess you have been waiting some time for this.

All my life.
Maybe put your hands... yes. There.
It's not too...

No. I want you to.

And so the desire that was in them flared and burned and it cannot be told if it burned brighter within him or within her. What can be told is that in this intensity of desire there was space for both of them to move slowly, and also to move as fast as they would eventually move, and in this way they described shapes and intimate legends that every lover knows, things that are burned into the very desire that glows within each of us equally and the same. There were many other things that night that might be told, and which in time came to be intoned in secret speech, but writing is not speaking and there are things that may not be written down in this inferior ledger. All that may be written is that their passion was absolute and only ever for each other, and that they sought each other out, and that there was space made in that night by their love, and no limit to the loving space that they created and held between them.

When Isabelle woke the next morning she started and turned to Winstanley Jones and said: Winnie. Wake up Winnie. I have to tell you something before I forget. And he yawned and smiled and said well tell me then, and this is what she said.

Winnie I had the strangest dream. I was visited by some people and they told me that they had a gift for me. Actually they said that you were a gift, Winnie, but they had something else for me too. They said that a great time was near, now that I am free, and that although they could not tell me what I was to do I would achieve greatness and that I had great expansiveness of heart.

Did they tell you to have great courage?

No. They just said that I great expansiveness of heart and that this was what mattered. They said that much work had already been done and that I would understand this in time and that I must

always remember to tell people of the courage it had taken to free me.

She moved towards him and put her hand out to rest it on his chest, and as she did so there was a flash of silver-white and she and Winnie saw the bracelet at precisely the same time. They both froze and looked at it slink and twist upon her arm, and no words were said for a moment while the reality of this strange event could sink in.

She was first to find her words.
Did you put this on me?
No. Not that I recall.
Are you still wearing yours?
Winnie looked at his own wrist, and saw that the bracelet was gone.
Winnie what is this?
He propped himself over her and looked at her.
I should know, he said.
But I don't.

He said that he was mostly ignorant about all of this but that he would tell her so much as he knew. He told her about the dreams he would have as a boy, and how he knew who Isabelle was in the instant that he met her. He described the time that he was Visited, and what had happened since. He told her something of that awful night of darkness, and how terrified he had been, and how a light had come into him and burned Lucius's darkness away. Isabelle asked who Lucius really was and Winnie said: I don't know. A powerful being of darkness. But that darkness might just have been in him, using him. Isabelle said that she had thought that about Lucius the first time she had met him, when she giggled at a word that he used incorrectly and saw a violent spasm slash across his face. I saw that darkness in him too, she said. I just thought it was pain. And Winnie said perhaps it was pain, and he said other things about that night and that darkness until Isabelle put her hand over his mouth, and in that quiet she shuddered at what might have been, for her but also for her brave love Winstanley.

Winnie lifted her hand and told her everything else that he knew, all the way down to the lady on the tram with her twinkling silver-white brooch. When he had finished Isabelle was quiet and then said: I did not know that there were such things in the world. Beyond all of our imagining, said Winnie. But there is goodness also beyond imagining, and she said: do you think I have been chosen for something good? And Winnie leant down to kiss her and he said: I choose you without any reservation. I would not be surprised if other people had the same idea as well.

And they were away again into the gyre of their new love, marking out in deft patterns on their bodies the love that buoyed them up, and there was nothing to disturb it. Winnie kindled a small light in his heart and it beamed out gently to Isabelle, and she sighed with the pure brightness and the cool reassurance of it. She knew instantly that this same light had destroyed a great demon, and that it could destroy all dark beings absolutely and the same, and although her mind prompted her towards fear that light in Winnie was only ever healing and uplifting. It shone without need of dominion, and it dissolved any doubts that she might have, and she loved him anew for the light that was within him. And with that she was kindled to another type of luminous intensity, this one hotter and more sensual, burning on a human level and with great human abundance. This firelight burning in Isabelle truly knew no bounds, although she was yet to see this truth. Winnie felt her flamelight and said: don't you go and burn me up now and she said: beings of light cannot burn, but all of humanity might, and I might just light all of them up with this flame. Winnie said: and will you lead them? To which she replied: when I find out where we are going. At these words she knew and he knew that the way would be made clear in time, and pure light and firelight had time to mingle themselves in the cool of that morning, to learn the lessons of the other element and see the goodness in one other, and many other things that shall not be written about.

Who are you? she asked.
Winnie, he said.

But then he thought, and smiled.
I am Clementine Winstanley Jones. At your service, Madame.
She smiled at him.
You saved me.
I did.
Why?
Because of who you are.
And who am I?
Winnie smiled and shook his head and said: I have no idea, Isabelle.

He looked into his heart to find more there to say, but as he looked he saw the absolute limitation of the words that were inscribed there. He saw now that his heart was only the heart of a man, and although it shone with the pure light of courage there were things far beyond its reach or its power to illuminate. He softened and his light shone and it shone into her heart, and Clementine Winstanley Jones saw things contained there beyond the reach of any words. He lowered his gaze and those things enclosed him and whispered truths to him, and there were only some that he could understand, and he spoke those things in quiet words for Isabelle to hear.

I cannot say who you are, said Winnie. I am only a man. But I do know: you are the vaster being. I have light in me, but your flame burns and shines in untold ways. It could kindle the very end of this world. Winnie was quiet again and kissed Isabelle deeply, and he felt her flamelight spark upon his lips, and as she burned and shone and sparkled and flowed with many secrets he looked at her and held her face gently and told her further words that she taught him by her lips, and they were these words and not any other words.

You are what was promised, he said. You are what is to come. We have yearned for you from time beyond remembrance. You are the Way, and the Truth, and my Light only ever shone so that it might liberate you. In sacred texts is it written, and upon the very Heart of Man. You are the hope of every broken heart in the world.

As he spoke Winnie knew that one further piece of bravery was

required of him, and so he consecrated himself absolutely to Isabelle. He laid down his life at her feet, and committed himself to her, and in that moment he knew that all need of his courage was over and dispensed with. He opened to her and she saw vastly into his heart, and by her own reckoning now she saw that his last words had indeed been inscribed there by those things that were within her. Isabelle felt herself soar and plunge and she saw the true reach of her own being, and saw her heart reach far beyond what can be held within a single ordinary heart. She saw her everything and her nothingness, and the truth that was within her was vast beyond the reach of any words. And she saw too that the bracelet upon her wrist was insignia of these things, and nothing more than that.

Isabelle turned to Winnie and kissed him deeply. She stroked his face and said some last quiet words to him, words of gratitude and praise that were not required of her, but she said them to him regardless and they were a balm to his poor man's soul. She spoke some final words, and then with those powers that were within in her she lifted them both and they gasped and broke up above the ocean surface of words, into the free space of a realm that can only be hinted at in this inferior ledger. They broke through words and all words fell away from them, and they rose further and still further, and such things were wrought and brought about that cannot be inscribed within books or poems or anywhere else reliant upon the abject poverty of words.

Now these are things that are still to come, and they are not written in any book, and they are not written even upon the courageous hearts of this world. The soul of courage is to give without hope of reward, and to fight bravely against evil even when it is deadly and overwhelming. The brave shall fight in the face of terrifying odds, and even in the certain knowledge that there can be no escape or victory. For such knowledge is circumscribed by words, and there may yet be hope for the brave, even when all of their own hope is lost, and defeat looms before them, inevitable.

So shall they fight, in places beyond hope. So shall they be valiant, through fear and agony and the terrible vale of death. So shall they fight, until every last story has been told, and the world is liberated from the terrible bondage of words. So they shall fight, and so may they prevail.

Such prayers are true words.
So they may prevail.
Even as it is written.
So may they prevail.

The End